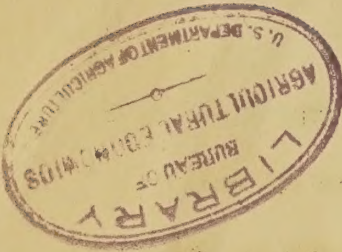


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A JOB FOR COOPERATORS

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Much of the support and leadership of the consumer movement in this country comes from farm areas. What you are doing in Ohio is an outstanding example. Consumers' cooperation in America is almost a farm movement. The great majority of consumer cooperators are farmers who have had long years of experience in tackling their producer problems in an organized way. Now, through consumers' cooperation, they are organizing to protect their interests on both fronts--to get more income and to get more for it.

This is important. It should mean that consumers' cooperation here will not be tied down to a penny-pinching program of making little money go a long way. People who have slight hope of doing anything to increase their earnings may go into cooperation with such a limited purpose in view. It is doubtful, however, that American farmers are interested in it solely for the purpose of making the best of a bad bargain. They are not in that frame of mind about their income possibilities.

With farmers participating, the cooperative movement in this country can have a wider objective. Farmers have learned that organized producer action is necessary. But they have also learned that they are not alone in organizing on that basis. Any group of

people who have something to sell, whether it be labor or goods or capital or a professional service, may organize to sell it collectively and to get more for it. This is all right as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far before it runs into a stone wall. It comes up against the fact that what any group gets through producer action it must get at the expense of others. This is because producer pressures alone do not enlarge the national income. They may change its distribution, but taken all in all they are more likely to reduce the national total than to increase it. Each pressure group can justify in its own interest what it is trying to do, but unless it can show how its action is helping to enlarge the total national income it fails to square its purposes with the public interest.

The consumers' cooperative movement can do something about this. Perhaps it will turn a deaf ear to producer problems, or set itself up in opposition to producer pressures of every kind. But it may adopt a larger view of its opportunity. With farm leadership playing an important part in its councils there is reason to hope that it will.

It can develop a broad-gauge consumer program which will recognize the value as well as the shortcomings of producer programs. It can urge the need of getting our conflicting producer purposes tied into each other so that all of them together add up to something and begin to make sense as part of a national picture. It can undertake the educational job of proving to people as producers that they will be better off as consumers only when they learn

how to maintain a higher level of output and get away with it.

The first principle of producer organization today is to produce less in order to get more. As consumers we can't accept this. Perhaps, as we build a program of action on our consumer interests, we shall some day be able to persuade ourselves that the sensible purpose of the producer group to which we happen to belong is to see that other groups produce more rather than that we ourselves produce less.

A start will be made in that direction when experience proves to different groups of people who think their interests are in conflict that their underlying problems are very much alike. Farm and labor, for example, are two great groups which for years have organized on a basis of getting for themselves a larger income out of the national total. After years of effort along this line large numbers of farmers and workers come out with one experience in common. They find themselves with not enough income to support a decent standard of living. In 1929 one-third of all non-farm families and two-thirds of all farm families earned less than \$1500 a year. For every 10 families on the farm there were 18 families elsewhere with less than that amount to live on. Two out of three non-farm families had less than \$2500 a year.

Consumers' cooperation offers an immediate practical basis on which different producer groups can work together. They have a common interest in getting the most for the money they earn. But stretching out a small income is not the same thing as earning a

good one, and larger incomes for the people as a whole will come only from larger production. Cooperative purchasing of consumer goods will not unleash the productive capacities of the country unless it reconciles the apparent conflict between producer and consumer purposes and solves the real conflict between the purposes of rival producer groups. To do this it must bring people together as consumers and direct their united efforts to the problems involved in getting more things produced.

Farm leadership of the consumer movement gives hope that this can be done. Farmers today are showing city workers how consumer objectives can be reached through cooperation. At the same time they have before them a great opportunity to make new headway against their problems as producers. If they can safeguard farm income against disastrous collapse, they will have made real progress for themselves. If by the same farm program they can give the country a genuine guarantee against food scarcity, they will have furnished proof that producer purposes are not necessarily at odds with consumer welfare. When farmers prove that, they will have paved the way for an aggressive attack upon scarcity all along the line.

We need that proof. We need it in industry and we need it in agriculture. It is worth all the cooperative effort it will take to put that proof to the test, for without it there is no real goal ahead for people who live by their own work. Producer groups can continue to produce less for imaginary rewards, consumers' cooperation can try to make dimes out of nickels, but it will all remain shadow boxing and mostly waste effort unless we learn how to gear up the machine to get us more goods.